Drifting Back to "Business as Usual" in Three War Towns

Bridgeport

Ammunition and Arms Producing Centre Turns Again to Manufacture of Toys and Other Products of Peace—Unemployment During Transition

Financial Bureau Staff Correspondence

BRIDGEPORT, March 29.—The future of Bridgeport is being decided in New York. The directors of the Remington Arms Union Metallic Cartridge Company, who meet in the Woolworth Building, are the men who must make the crucial choice. Whether this strategic centre in the industrial battle line shall turn to peace and plenty or whether its vitality shall be sapped by protracted unemployment depends on the policy that these men adopt.

Bridgeport is looking to the nation's metropolis with anxious eyes. But that is not because the city depends on one industry for its sustenance. Quite the contrary. There are 190 manufacturing plants here, and when the town criers assert that virtually everything except furniture and agricultural implements is made here they are not far from the truth.

The war brought world-wide fame to Bridgeport, but only three important new manufacturing plants. When the signing of the armistice transformed the most essential product of war into a non-essential Bridgeport faced a serious readjustment. While the great conflict lasted sixty factories here made war commodities exclusively and 78 per cent of the remaining plants were partly on a war basis.

Shuffling Labor During Adjustment

As the government began drastically to cancel its orders for arms and ammunition a great shuffling of labor began. In the relentless human scramble many thousands were dropped from the payrolls, yet they were not all turned out into the street. The toy factories, the corset plants, the automobile factories and the various others which had been discouraged during the war immediately took advantage of the opportunity to get workers and to resume normal activity.

Tens of thousands were dropped with little warning by the war plants, but the reabsorption into peace industry took care of all but 17,500. Of these many were "floaters," and they drifted away from Bridgeport as soon as the lure of fantastic wages and continuous overtime became a fact of the past. Moreover, many of the workers who were grinding out the implements of war were women and children, who went into the war plants to help out in the emergency. When the crisis passed they were ready to return to their households and to the schools. After the various factors in the readjustment operated, a surplus of 7,500 workers remained uncared for, and it is estimated that that number of persons who desire jobs are without work to-day. In the Bridgeport ordnance district, which includes all of Connecticut and western Massachusetts, the army of unemployed has reached 20,000.

Perhaps from 40,000 to 50,000 are engaged in the factories of Bridgeport at present. At its peak the Remington Arms plant employed only 13,000. Although the latter's personnel capacity is small compared with the aggregate capacity of the rest of the factories, it would be more than ample to save the situation.

Organized Workers Are Restive

Organized labor is restive, but its leaders admit that if the large war plants which are all but idle now, as they are finishing up their last orders, start manufacturing commercial products unemployment will cease to trouble the city. The members of the local branch of the International Association of Machinists, which is the most powerful labor organization here, are planning to offer their own solution if the manufacturers lag after May 15. They are now busily recruiting new members and purpose to demand a progressive shortening of hours of employment to spread the opportunity for work to all who seek jobs.

Samuel Lavit, business agent of the union and leader of the strike last summer, told The Tribune that the union will demand a forty-four hour week by May 15, and a continuous shortening of the hours of labor until unemployment ceases. He said that the union felt that the city administration had erred grievously in failing actively to support the project recently before the state Legislature to make harbor improvements at Bridgeport, which largest port in the United States and given employment to thousands.

Eagerness to learn of the plans of the Remington Arms Company, whose great emergency plant of thirteen units was built with a special view to conversion at the end of hostilities, has stimulated the growth of a new industry here—the development and distribution of rumors. That the company will make cash registers, adding machines, typewriters or automobile parts has been oft repeated. Moreover, every one who has traversed the local Rialto has heard that the Ford Motor Company was about to purchase the plant and that the Singer Sewing Machine Company had an option on it.

The Search for The Ideal Product

The officials of the company seek out these rumors with genuine interest, perhaps hoping to get a good suggestion in that way. But they have denied all of them categorically. The local plant managers say the company is not yet prepared to disclose its plans for the future. Officers of the company at the executive offices assert they are still in the dark, groping in the experimental stage. Ideas come from every part of the country, and a regular shifting process has been developed. Many of the suggestions are not found practicable. Some are not adapted to the needs of the plants. Others could not be made competitively and others are not regarded as marketable.

In the cost plus days of the war production was the thing. Now production, in the view of the Remington Arms executives, is justified only in so far as the product would be salable at a profit. The ideal product, they say, would be one of a sufficiently wide appeal to keep all of the thirteen units and the full labor capacity of the emergency plant employed. The company officials declare that they have not decided what they will do.

One important factor that is retarding the transition to peace work in large plants, such as the Remington Arms, is the colossal accounting task incident to a winding up of accounts with the government. Infinite detail complicates the company's job of submitting claims to the government and likewise delays decision by the government. Much of the machinery in the Remington Arms plant was owned by the government and much by the company. It is difficult to segregate values and ownership equitably; and the settlement of payments is also made labyrinthal by the fact that several systems of payment—straight contracts, cost plus contracts, premium and penalty contracts—were in vogue. Until these things are concluded the company feels that it is unable to give its undivided attention to the problems that lie ahead.

From Guns to Ploughshares

Another halting factor at Bridgeport is the fact that, although agreement has been reached regarding the settlements of most pending contracts, no payments have been made as yet. Within the limits of the city 1,600,000 square feet of floor space lie idle. All but 150,000 square feet of this are in the Remington Arms and Liberty Ordnance Company plants. At its peak the Remington Arms employed 13,000 men and women. Now there are 2,500 on the payroll, finishing work in process. The skeleton of the larger organization remains almost intact, however, and is ready to build up a large personnel.

The Union Metallic Cartridge Company, which is owned by the Remington Arms, merely expanded its plant during the war. It did not create it after 1914. Therefore, it is now reverting to its pre-war occupation of producing sporting ammunition and making ammunition to meet the peace needs of this and other governments. The U. M. C. forces have just completed the last war order of shells for the government and are now engaged in loading them.

The Liberty Ordnance Company, which was built during the war, now lies idle and, according to officers of the ordnance department, the owners of the property will place it on sale next month. At present, the government is using it as a storage place. Until just before the signing of the armistice, the American Can Company operated the works for the government at $1 a year.

The third large war plant was Engineering Company. The government paid for the building, and will relinquish it, it is reported, on April 15, when the Bullard Machine Tool Company will purchase it, if it is available at a "reasonable price." The Bullard war plant made 155-mm. g. p. f. field artillery, and visiting French and ordnance officers characterized it as one of the finest gunshops in the world. It is not quite through with its war orders.

The American and British Manufacturing Company, which has made various kinds of munitions for the government since 1900, is still employing its normal force of 1,000, but its war orders are tapering off. Its officers have new kinds of peace activities under consideration.

Boom Over, But Activity Continues

Meantime, while the strictly war plants have been trying to catch up with the political facts, the normal factories of Bridgeport, which had suspended their peace work to make the sinews of war, have already gone far in the transition to peace conditions. Several of the larger industries are expanding, and none of the larger factories is closed down. The Raybestos Company, makers of asbestos, are now constructing a big plant, which will double their productive capacity. The hardware, machine, tool, corset, graphophone, automobile and textile factories are especially active.

Those visitors whose knowledge of Bridgeport was obtained in picturesque magazine articles are disappointed on discovering that this is "not a city that was." The hotels are turning away guests because of lack of accommodations. There is still a shortage of apartments and houses here, although it is true that there is less crowding in the rooming places where the munitions workers gathered. New building never caught up with the shortage here during the war, and industrial demobilization has only made the need slightly less intense. Eight hundred new government houses will be available beginning April 1 and the weeks following.

The gain in workers during the war was at least 30,000. The total population of the city rose to 182,000 in 1918, compared with 120,000 in 1914. The volume of business done by the telephone company doubled during the war. And, as the life of the city has been geared at a less intense pace, the telephone traffic has dropped 30 per cent.

The Ultimate Effects of Boom

The retail stores which felt the reflex of the war boom much less than is generally believed are not suffering now. The general managers of several of the largest department stores in the city say that the volume of business at present shows an increase over the same period a year ago. Similar reports were made by the keepers of specialty shops. The consensus of opinion was that, though the aggregate retail business of the city may have fallen off since November 11, the decline has not been heavy. Bridgeport, the merchants say, did not derive as great benefits from the war boom as was commonly imagined, as the dollars that were paid to many of the outsiders who were attracted by high wages commuted. The men would send money out of town to their families, who would spend it in places other than Bridgeport. Because of this tendency one large local bank here for more than a year was getting $300,000 to $400,000 a week in new money from the Treasury to meet payrolls.

Bridgeport folk are not certain that the war boom has left any permanent benefits. An authorized spokesman for the manufacturers of the city argued in this way: "The squatting of the great war plants here brought large groups of workers, and after the armistice they were dumped into the city. Of course, many of them were floaters, who soon drifted away. Temporary workers do not help a city. They are simply on the make and without any civic consciousness. Then, too, the munitions plants, by attracting labor with high wages, made it extremely difficult for the other factories of the city to get help. The growth was of the mushroom variety and was not particularly healthy.

"On the other side of the balance sheet it may have swelled the receipts of some of the retailers. It gave employment to labor. The boom assisted people who took in boarders to meet high rents."

Some of the manufacturers felt that the munition plants were disturbing the labor situation unduly, and, therefore, felt somewhat bitterly against them. One large employer of labor here said that he would not take back any of his workers who had left his employ to enter the munitions plants, as he regarded them as "disloyal to the company." It should be said, however, that the judgment of the majority of the manufacturers here regarding the big war plants was tempered by patriotism and the realization that high power production at any cost

Watertown

Manufacturing City, in Heart of Upstate Agricultural Region, Seething With Industrial Unrest—The War Boom Brought Prosperity and Labor Ills

Financial Bureau Staff Correspondence

WATERTOWN, March 29.—Think of a peaceful little city of 30,000 nestling in the valley of the Black River, in the centre of one of the richest agricultural regions of the United States. Then picture the same little city in the throes of a social upheaval, with labor unrest as the prime factor. That is the situation in Watertown. Hundreds of skilled workers are out on strike in the city. Three manufacturing concerns are involved. "Trade unionism is fighting for its very existence in Watertown," declare the labor leaders. The issue is "unionism vs. non-unionism." It is sharply drawn. The labor leaders announce their intention, if they win, to unionize completely the industries of the city.

Prosperity and Unrest Products of the War

War brought prosperity to Watertown. It also brought in its train a spirit of unrest among the working classes. The New York Air Brake Company, the leading industry here, which is the second largest manufacturer of railway airbrake equipment, went into the munitions business on a giant scale, building several large war plant units, where it turned out huge amounts of shells and other war-making devices, both for the Allies and the United States.

In its search for skilled and unskilled labor to operate the war plants the company combed the country. It had to compete in its search for labor with the thousand and one other munition concerns seeking men. It imported approximately 5,000 workers. Many came from the farms of the surrounding country. Others came from the large industrial centres. The newcomers from the industrial centres brought with them many of the radical ideas of the new labor movement and transmitted them to the old workers. So long as there was plenty of work nothing happened. But when the war ended and the war business halted, necessitating the turning off of the huge surplus of workers, trouble began. For a time Watertown was a city full of unemployed. Most of the floaters have since left for other more promising fields of employment, but the spirit of unrest remained behind, and now Watertown, three hundred miles away from the great centre of congested population, has been thrown into the turmoil of a labor war.

Watertown's predicament is interesting, for it is symptomatic. It is what is happening in many other small towns and cities the country over. The labor party is well organized and has plenty of funds. It has its own newspaper. It has brought in leaders from other cities. It has several hundred pickets thrown about the air brake company, urging what labor calls "scabs" to join the movement.

Radicalism of Various Species

With the penetration of the labor movement into this agricultural district has come some of the other natural concomitants. Most of the leaders of the strike are men of socialistic tendencies. They deny they are I. W. W.'s and Bolshevists, but confess to radicalism of other species. A meeting was held the other night by the principal movers in the strike. James Manson, president of the Trades Assembly of Watertown, is a leader of the machinists' union which is backing the strike.

"We are here to organize an army of unemployed," Manson, who is a Socialist and one of the leaders of the party here, told his followers. "We might not have enough to organize a whole regiment at this time, but I think we have enough for a company. The more we get in the army the more dangerous we will be. Men are not dangerous until they become hungry. By and by it will be fight or starve. What are we going to do? We have heard of the Bolsheviki in Russia, Germany and England. They couldn't stop them there. If things continue we will have Bolshevists here. Maybe they can stop us, but I don't believe it. The army of the unemployed has it in their own hands and when they get to be a great hungry army they are going to do something." Yet there is no general unemployment in Watertown, excepting so far as the strikers are concerned. Most of the munition gone to other fields. The city is prosperous and suffering among the poor is less than in normal times.

The "Labor News" is the organ of the labor men of Watertown and the Socialists. It is edited by O. A. Babcock, an ex-Methodist, hailing from St. Lawrence county, an idealist and a Socialist of the Fabian school. Here is his creed in his own words:

As the Future Appears To the Socialist

"In trying always to take a reasonable and scientific viewpoint it seems to me that we are unable to see very far ahead excepting on broad general principles. For instance, it appears to be inevitable that labor will agitate unconsciously rather than premeditatedly for a greater and still greater share of the value of its products until, as in the case of the railroad, industry after industry breaks down and government operation and ownership intervenes in order to keep industry functioning. Taking this broad general view it is idle to speculate as to the precise direction that labor will move next. Psychological factors as well as material necessities may inspire movements of which we little dream to-day. I am not so much concerned with beatific visions of what we would like to see realized as in the stern necessities which we must recognize in order to escape serious social friction or possibly violent revolution. And it is because I realize that the workers have more to lose by violence than other classes that I am opposed to everything that leads, even indirectly, to violence where violence can be evaded. It seems clear to me that since the large majority of wage workers are still pressed closely for daily necessities, while at the same time they read of the 20,000 or more new millionaires made by this war, and while the inequalities of life are more apparent than ever before, the one safe attitude for every lover of his kind and for every true American to take is to help in the social readjustment by such degrees as shall involve the least jar. In other words, we want to conserve all that is good in the old while we are making the transition to the new. But we must not forget that, aside from its being right or wrong, change is inevitable and we are not friends of our race if we blindly oppose change as such."

Upstate Bolsheviks Are in Union

Babcock is a believer in Bolshevism. He is an avowed supporter of Lenine and Trotzky. "The Bolshevik government of Russia is still growing stronger after one year of fiery trial," he said in a recent issue of "The Labor News," "and it is even reaching out into neighboring countries with brother hands to spread the blessed rule of liberty. If the Bolshevik government made mistakes it never in a thousand years could commit the sum of crimes involved in causing such a war as the world has just suffered—a war for which the world's capitalism is to blame. The tales of Lenine and Trotzky being bribed by Germany are well known to be malicious and ingenious misrepresentations by those who set them forth, but many shallow people eagerly follow them, although Lenine and Trotzky should have their admiration and support. Time, however, will reveal the truth. Time is likely to show these same charges of arson, rape and assassination against Workmen's and Soldiers' councils arising in Germany and Spain or in any other nation utterly regardless of reason or fact. Our plutocrat masters never scrupled consistently or otherwise."

After the Scalps Of "Capitalistic" Press

In another connection Babcock wrote: "When we come to our own reconstruction, unless there is a marked change and the people are given something from the big papers, then, when our people are disillusioned finally and we awaken suddenly, and we have, as Roosevelt threatened in 1912, our own replica of the French Revolution, the mob will seek not so much the heads of the rulers as the heads of big business and of the owners and editors of the big capitalistic newspapers." Babcock is one of the leaders of the labor movement here and has the support of the union organization.

The Source of The Trouble

Labor trouble has been brewing in Watertown, a city normally free its geographical position, since last summer. The Machinists' Union signed a working agreement with the New York Air Brake Company at that time. Now they charge that the agreement was broken in many ways and that after the signing of the armistice the company discriminated against the leaders by discharging them, even in cases where they were old and faithful employes. A combination of petty grievances against the company is one explanation for the attitude of the workers, who claim that for the last twenty-five years the company has not played fair with them, a charge which the company officials deny.

The men are now seeking a straight eight-hour day with the same pay as for a ten-hour day. They also want a closed shop. The company, on the other hand, asserts it is willing to take its old men back, but declares its unwillingness to be dictated to by imported labor leaders and agitators. A curious thing in connection with the strike situation is that the moulders of the Air Brake Company, the men who work in the foundry, are welded into a strong union organization, but have refused to go out on strike in sympathy with the Machinists' Union.

Mediation Thus Far Has Failed

When the machinists' union announced three weeks ago that a strike had been called, effective March 3, the company countered with a lockout. The brake plant was closed down for a week, during which time not a wheel turned. During the shutdown the company gave the workers desirous of continuing on the job an opportunity to sign an agreement, with pay allowed for the time lost during the walkout. When the plant resumed operations, on March 10, a substantial working force was on hand, including some of the strikers, and the latest estimate of the management is that out of 1,500 men all but 400 are at work. The strikers dispute the figures and claim that the strike is being successfully carried on.

Conciliation Unsuccessful

Federal and state authorities on labor matters have moved to bring the company and strikers together, but without results, so far. A hearing has already been held, attended by a labor conciliator from Washington, at which the labor men presented their case. The leaders of the labor movement here threaten, if they are successful in this strike, to unionize completely all of Watertown's industries. Steps will be taken to organize retail clerks, waiters, factory workers of all kinds, to the end that labor will hold the whip hand here.

Feeling runs high between the recalcitrant workers and the management of the air brake company, but so far the strike has been conducted without violence. For a time the strikers conducted their picketing campaign with such fervor that the company finally appealed to the court and obtained an injunction preventing the men who are out from intimidating workers desirous of continuing their vocation. But the union men have continued picketing.

At the hearing before representatives of the Federal War Labor Board here the attorney for the strikers summed up the case of the workers thus: "Our grievances are as to wages, hours, women's work and discrimination." Completely analyzed, the strike has resolved itself into a struggle for more pay, for shorter hours and the unionization of Watertown. So far neither side shows any signs of being willing to compromise. The company has yet to present its case to the Federal representatives.

Out of the chaos of the strike movement has been brought forth the idea of the labor party in Watertown, on the grounds as set forth in the preamble of the new organization, that "we feel that since the wellbeing of our whole nation rests upon the welfare of our workers, we, the workers of Watertown, are persuaded that the time has come to join our brothers everywhere in the formation of a political party that shall express our needs, and, so far as lies within our power, establish them firmly in the forms and processes of law. We, therefore, appeal to our brothers and sisters in every line of useful work, whether an employe or small proprietor in shop, store, field, office, transportation or communication service, to join us in this effort to obtain a larger, freer and a better life for the people."

Unity With Farmers Declared

The new party announces that workers in agriculture, the fundamental industry of civilization, whether farm owners or employes, are entitled to just as fair hours and pay as the most favored labor union members, and the organized dairymen are recognized as being brothers and fellow workers in this

Wilmington

Thousands of Munition Workers, After the Cessation of Work for the Government, Have Now Returned to the Places Whence They Came

Financial Bureau Staff Correspondence

WILMINGTON, MARCH 29—The ebb and flow of the human tide of war workers at the munitions plants seemed as inevitable as the action of the sea. From every state in the Union men and women gravitated here to embark on the great adventure of making smokeless powder in those epic days when the future of humanity was being tested on the battlefields of Europe. And immediately after the last shot of the war had been fired the drift of human labor was irresistibly in the reverse direction.

For four months the outpouring of plain men and women who met the Teutonic challenge during the war by producing in the plants of E. I. du Pont de Nemours & Co. 40 per cent of the powder used by the Allied nations has gone on. Now, as the unscrambling is about completed the personnel in the munition plants has been reduced to the minimum necessary to take care of the motionless machinery, which became scrap when the armistice was signed.

Types of laborers in the munition plants were as diverse as American labor itself. A cross-section of all American labor would have corresponded with the classification in the du Pont war plants. Contrasts in personality rubbed elbows in the factories of destructive powder, and all of them in the period that is just closing were confronted with the task of somersaulting back into peace activities. Professors and hoboes, women workers holding their first jobs and highly skilled mechanics, white collar men and rough and ready fellows of the lumber camp type were attracted to the war plants while the fighting lasted, and poured out for the most part in the subsequent weeks of unwinding.

Where the Munition Workers Have Gone

The farmers who, in quest of the gold and the thrill that were the war workers' reward, abandoned their cows and chickens and small holdings during the conflict are now back on the farm, planting for the next harvest—in some cases the first in four or five years. The movement from the munition plants to the soil has reached large proportions, and should have an influence on the supply of food. The farmer who spent a few years dodging explosions may be expected to be more energetic and less provincial than the traditional agrarian. In many instances the savings of the rustics during their career in industrialism were large enough to pay off their mortgages and to free them to reap the full rewards of their agrarian efforts.

Moreover, the school teachers who found in the powder plants their niche in, the great warmaking scheme are now back in the country districts, instructing in the three "R's" instead of grinding out powder destined during the war to produce dead Germans. Perhaps their return is helping to overcome the nation-wide shortage of schoolmasters and schoolma'ms which was reported during the emergency period. And so, too, the village cobblers who turned to powder making are back at their old benches, and the thousands of other miscellaneous workers from the small towns who ran away from their humdrum activities and limited opportunities to the plants that produced munitions and fantastic wages are back again at their accustomed posts.

Back to the Old Jobs Again

Likewise, the workers in the nonessential industries—interior decorators, engravers, jewelry workers and the whole category of toilers whose occupations were dissociated from the job of winning the war, and who therefore, out of economic necessity, patriotism and the operation of the work-or-fight principle, filtered into the war plants, are in many instances now back plying once more their accustomed trades, which recaptured their lost prestige after the matching of fighting stamina on the fields of France was over.

Perhaps the greatest numbers in the army of munition makers were recruited from the ranks of skilled mechanics and unskilled laborers—abstractions behind which are those bundles of contradictions which comprise human souls. It is more difficult to trace their reabsorption into peace time pursuits. The turnover of unskilled labor—particularly in times like the present of is large. Even in war time, when labor was so preciously scarce that a worker would be discharged only for a single offence in the du Pont plants, according to the men—the offence of carrying lighted matches in powder factories for the second time—the labor turnover was between 12 and 20 per cent a month.

Most of the miscellaneous workers were transferred to other large industrial plants in other districts, whose activity did not wither away when the guns ceased firing. The du Pont company turned its elaborately organized labor department, which had stretched out a dragnet for workers in various parts of the country during the war, into a job-seeking agency after the armistice was signed. Moreover, the company invited representatives of large employers of labor to visit its plants and interview its workers who were about to be discharged.

Jobs for All, Official Says

"Not a single war worker left the employ of the du Pont company without an offer of another job," a leading executive of the company's labor department told The Tribune. "Between 20 and 30 per cent actually got places through this coöperative effort, and the other 70 per cent or more, ignoring offers received at the plants, seemed to have plans of their own and showed great anxiety to get back to their home communities, where opportunities abundant seemed to have been waiting for them.

"As soon as hostilities were over our workers realized that their temporary employment in making munitions of war was over and were restless in their desire to leave. Voluntary leavings after the first two weeks were adequate to take care of the progressive curtailment of activities which the company was making. Men and women would leave as they found jobs, and the celerity with which many of them moved away indicated that they were being rapidly absorbed in normal occupations.

"In fact, many representatives of outside employers of labor left our plants because men were not being laid off rapidly enough, indicating that instead of flooding the labor market our demobilization was not quick enough to meet the shortage of labor which persisted for weeks after the signing of the armistice."

When the du Pont company had formulated its plan for sloughing off its smokeless powder and guncotton activities, its labor staff studied the general employment situation and invited representatives of the large shipbuilding corporations, the steel companies, the railroads and the other great employers of labor to come to the various plants and interview the du Pont workers. A literal labor market was thus created.

The du Pont company strove after selective demobilization of its workers. When moulders or electrical workers, let us say, were in special demand, the effort was made to let them leave at a mutually convenient time. The new employer was in all cases asked to pay the railroad fare of the worker to his new destination.

"As our workers were about to be let out," the executive of the du Pont labor department further explained, "our employment men would discuss with them their opportunity for other jobs and would advise them about conditions. In all cases we advised against loafing and in favor of getting into peace work while the demand for labor continued. As they went into new jobs, I believe the basic wage standards were kept up. I do not think that there is any real unemployment among our workers now."

Out of the 85,600 men and women, unorganized, but unified by common aims, who strained themselves to the utmost during the war that powder might flow in an unbroken stream across the Atlantic Ocean, only a few thousand are now left on the payrolls.

Future Plans of Du Ponts Awaited

Several thousand workers have remained around Wilmington to rest and wait for the du Ponts to spring some great surprise about new peace activities which will give them work. Many have asked for "furlough" without pay, so that they will remain eligible for bonuses and divisions of stock which come after continuous service. Any announcement by the company of extensions of activities is received by the camp followers as news of the profoundest